WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

AN ECUMENICAL CALL TO JUST PEACE

"Guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79)

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An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace

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Preamble: This call is a concerted Christian voice addressed primarily to the worldwide Christian community. Inspired by the example of Jesus of Nazareth, it invites Christians to commit themselves to the Way of Just Peace. Aware that the promise of peace is a core value of all religions, it reaches out to all who seek peace according to their own religious traditions and commitments. The call is received by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and commended for study, reflection, collaboration and common action. It is issued in response to a WCC Assembly recommendation in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006, and builds on insights gained in the course of the ecumenical "Decade to Overcome Violence, 2001-2010: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace."

Just Peace embodies a fundamental shift in ethical practice. It implies a different framework of analysis and criteria for action. This call signals the shift and indicates some of the implications for the life and witness of the churches. A resource document, the Just Peace Companion, *presents more developed biblical, theological and ethical considerations, proposals for further exploration and examples of good practice. It is hoped that these materials, together with the commitments arising from the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, in May 2011, under the theme "Glory to God and Peace on Earth," will assist the forthcoming Assembly of the WCC to reach a new ecumenical consensus on justice and peace.*

1 **Justice embracing peace.** Without peace, can there be justice? Without justice, can there be peace? Too often, we pursue justice at the expense of peace, and peace at the expense of justice. To conceive peace apart from justice is to compromise the hope that "justice and peace shall embrace" (Ps. 85:10). When justice and peace are lacking, or set in opposition, we need to reform our ways. Let us rise, therefore, and work together for peace and justice.

2 **Let the peoples speak:** There are many stories to tell—stories soaked with violence, the violation of human dignity and the destruction of creation. If all ears would hear the cries, no place would be truly silent. Many continue to reel from the impact of wars; ethnic and religious animosity, discrimination based on race and caste mar the façade of nations and leave ugly scars. Thousands are dead, displaced, homeless, refugees within their own homeland. Women and children often bear the brunt of conflicts: many women are abused, trafficked, killed; children are separated from their parents, orphaned, recruited as soldiers, abused. Citizens in some countries face violence by occupation, paramilitaries, guerrillas, criminal cartels or government forces. Citizens of many nations suffer governments obsessed with national security and armed might; yet these fail to bring real security, year after year. Thousands of children die each day from inadequate nutrition while those in power continue to make economic and political decisions that favor a relative few.

3 **Let the Scriptures speak:** The Bible makes justice the inseparable companion of peace (Isaiah 32:17; James 3:18). Both point to right and sustainable relationships in human society, the vitality of our connections with the earth, the "well-being" and integrity of creation. Peace is God's gift to a broken but beloved world, today as in the lifetime of Jesus Christ: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you." (John 14:27). Through the life and teachings, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we perceive peace as both promise and present—a hope for the future and a gift here and now.

4 Jesus told us to love our enemies, pray for our persecutors, and not to use deadly weapons. His peace is expressed by the spirit

of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11). Despite persecution, he remains steadfast in his active nonviolence, even to death. His life of commitment to justice ends on a cross, an instrument of torture and execution. With the resurrection of Jesus, God confirms that such steadfast love, such obedience, such trust, leads to life. This is true also for us.

5 Wherever there is forgiveness, respect for human dignity, generosity, and care for the weak in the common life of humanity, we catch a glimpse—no matter how dim—of the gift of peace. It follows therefore that peace is lost when injustice, poverty and disease—as well as armed conflict, violence, and war—inflict wounds on the bodies and souls of human beings, on society and on the earth.

6 Yet some texts in the scriptures associate violence with the will of God. On the basis of these texts, sections of our Christian family have legitimized and continue to legitimize the use of violence by themselves and others. We can no longer read such texts without calling attention to the human failure to answer the divine call to peace. Today, we must interrogate texts that speak of violence, hate and prejudice, or call for the wrath of God to annihilate another people. We must allow such texts to teach us to discern when, like the people in the Bible, our purposes, our schemes, our animosities, passions and habits reflect our desires rather than the will of God.

7 **Let the church speak:** As the Body of Christ, the church is called to be a place of peacemaking. In manifold ways, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, our liturgical traditions illustrate how God's peace calls us to share peace with each other and with the world. Yet, more often than not, churches fail to live out their call. Christian disunity, which in many ways undermines the churches' credibility in terms of peacemaking, invites us to a continuous conversion of hearts and minds. Only when grounded in God's peace can communities of faith be "agents of reconciliation and peace with justice in homes, churches and societies as well as in political, social and economic structures at the global level" (WCC

Assembly, 1998). The church that lives the peace it proclaims is what Jesus called a city set on a hill for all to see (Matt. 5:14). Believers exercising the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to them by God in Christ point beyond the churches to what God is doing in the world (see 2 Cor. 5:18).

THE WAY OF JUST PEACE

8 There are many ways of responding to violence; many ways of practicing peace. As members of the community that proclaims Christ the embodiment of peace, we respond to the call to bring the divine gift of peace into contemporary contexts of violence and conflict. So we join the Way of Just Peace, which requires both movement towards the goal and commitment to the journey. We invite people of all worldviews and religious traditions to consider the goal and to share of their journeys. Just Peace invites all of us to testify with our lives. To pursue peace we must prevent and eliminate personal, structural and media violence, including violence against people because of race, caste, gender, sexual orientation, culture or religion. We must be responsible to those who have gone before us, living in ways that honor the wisdom of our ancestors and the witness of the saints in Christ. We also have a responsibility to those who are the future: our children, "tomorrow people". Our children deserve to inherit a more just and peaceful world.

9 Nonviolent resistance is central to the Way of Just Peace. Well-organized and peaceful resistance is active, tenacious and effective – whether in the face of governmental oppression and abuse or business practices which exploit vulnerable communities and creation. Recognizing that the strength of the powerful depends on the obedience and compliance of citizens, of soldiers and, increasingly, of consumers, nonviolent strategies may include acts of civil disobedience and non-compliance.

10 On the Way of Just Peace the justifications of armed conflict and war become increasingly implausible and unacceptable. The churches have struggled with their disagreement on this mat-

ter for decades; however, the Way of Just Peace now compels us to move forward. Yet, to condemn war is not enough; we must do everything in our power to promote justice and peaceful cooperation among peoples and nations. The Way of Just Peace is fundamentally different from the concept of "just war" and much more than criteria for protecting people from the unjust use of force; in addition to silencing weapons it embraces social justice, the rule of law, respect for human rights and shared human security.

11 Within the limitations of tongue and intellect, we propose that Just Peace may be comprehended as *a collective and dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation.*

LIVING THE JOURNEY

12 Just Peace is a journey into God's purpose for humanity and all creation, trusting that God will "guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79).

13 **The journey is difficult.** We recognize that we must face up to truth along the way. We come to realize how often we deceive ourselves and are complicit with violence. We learn to give up looking for justifications of what we have done, and train ourselves in the practice of justice. This means confessing our wrong-doings, giving and receiving forgiveness and learning to reconcile with each other.

14 The sins of violence and war divide communities deeply. Those who have stereotyped and demonized their adversaries will need long-term support and accompaniment in order to work through their condition and be healed. To reconcile with enemies and to restore broken relationships is a lengthy process as well as a necessary goal. In a process of reconciliation there are no longer powerful and powerless, superior and inferior, mighty and lowly. Both victims and victimizers are transformed.

15 Peace agreements are often fragile, temporary, and inadequate. Places where peace is declared may still be filled with hatred. Repairing the damage of war and violence may take longer than the conflict that caused it. But what exists of peace along the way, though imperfect, is a promise of greater things to come.

16 **We journey together.** The church divided about peace, and churches torn by conflict, have little credibility as witnesses or workers for peace. The churches' power to work for and witness to peace depends on finding a common purpose in the service of peace despite differences in ethnic and national identity, and even in doctrine and church order.

17 We travel as a community, sharing an ethic and practice of peace that includes forgiveness and love of enemies, active nonviolence and respect for others, gentleness and mercy. We strive to give of our lives in solidarity with others and for the common good. We pursue peace in prayer, asking God for discernment as we go and for the fruits of the Spirit along the way.

18 In loving communities of faith that journey together, there are many hands to unburden the weary. One may have a witness of hope in the face of despair; another, a generous love for the needy. People who have suffered much find the courage to keep on living despite tragedy and loss. The power of the gospel enables them to leave behind even the unimaginable burdens of personal and collective sin, of anger, bitterness and hatred, which are the legacy of violence and war. Forgiveness does not erase the past; but when we look back we may well see that memories were healed, burdens were set aside and traumas were shared with others and with God. We are able to travel on.

19 **The journey is inviting.** With time and dedication to the cause, more and more people hear the call to become peacemakers. They come from wide circles within the church, from other communities of faith, and from society at large. They work to overcome divisions of race and religion, nation and class; learn to stand with the impoverished; or take up the difficult ministry of reconciliation.

Many discover that peace cannot be sustained without caring for creation and cherishing God's miraculous handiwork.

20 Sharing the road with our neighbours, we learn to move from defending what is ours towards living generous, open lives. We find our feet as peacemakers. We discover people from different walks of life. We gain strength in working with them, acknowledging our mutual vulnerability and affirming our common humanity. The other is no longer a stranger or an adversary but a fellow human being with whom we share both the road and the journey.

SIGNPOSTS ON THE WAY OF JUST PEACE

21 **Just Peace and the transformation of conflict.** Transforming conflicts is an essential part of peacemaking. The process of transformation begins with unmasking violence and uncovering hidden conflict in order to make their consequences visible to victims and communities. Conflict transformation aims at challenging adversaries to redirect their conflicting interests towards the common good. It may have to disturb an artificial peace, expose structural violence or find ways to restore relationships without retribution. The vocation of churches and religious communities is to accompany the victims of violence and be their advocates. It also includes strengthening civic mechanisms for managing conflicts and holding public authorities and other perpetrators accountable–even perpetrators from within church communities. The "rule of law" is a critical framework for all such efforts.

22 **Just Peace and the use of armed force.** Yet there are bound to be times when our commitment to Just Peace is put to a test, since peace is pursued in the midst of violence and under the threat of violent conflict. There are extreme circumstances where, as the last resort and the lesser evil, the lawful use of armed force may become necessary in order to protect vulnerable groups of people exposed to imminent lethal threats. Yet, even then we recognise the use of armed force in situations of conflict as both a sign of serious failure and a new obstacle on the Way of Just Peace.

23 While we acknowledge the authority of the United Nations under international law to respond to threats to world peace in the spirit and the letter of the UN Charter, including the use of military power within the constraints of international law, we feel obliged as Christians to go further – to challenge any theological or *other* justifications of the use of military power and to consider reliance on the concept of a "just war" and its customary use to be obsolete.

24 We acknowledge the moral dilemma inherent in these affirmations. The dilemma is partially resolved if the criteria developed in the just war tradition may still serve as a framework for an ethic of the lawful use of force. That ethic would allow, for example, consideration of "just policing", the emergence of a new norm in international law around the "responsibility to protect" and the exercise in good faith of the peacemaking mechanisms enshrined in the UN Charter. Conscientious objection to service in armed forces should be recognized as a human right. Much else that is antithetical to peace and the international rule of law must be categorically and finally rejected, starting with the possession or use of all weapons of mass destruction. Our common life invites convergence in thought, action and law for the making and building of peace. As Christians we therefore commit to a transformed ethical discourse that guides the community in the praxis of nonviolent conflict transformation and in fostering conditions for progress toward peace.

25 **Just Peace and human dignity.** Our scriptures teach us that humanity is created in the likeness of God and is graced with dignity and rights. The recognition of this dignity and these rights is central to our understanding of Just Peace. We affirm that universal human rights are the indispensable international legal instrument for protecting human dignity. To that end we hold states responsible for ensuring the rule of law and guaranteeing civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights. However, we observe that abuse of human rights is rampant in many societies, in war and in peace, and that those who should be held accountable benefit from impunity. In response we must reach out in friendship

and cooperation to all partners in civil society, including people of other religions, who seek to defend human rights and strengthen the international rule of law.

26 Just Peace and caring for creation. God made all things good and has entrusted humankind with the responsibility to care for creation (Gen. 2:4b-9). The exploitation of the natural world and the misuse of its finite resources disclose a pattern of violence that often benefits some people at the expense of many. We know that all creation groans to be set free, not least from the abusive actions of humans (Romans 8:22). As people of faith, we acknowledge our guilt for the damage we have done to creation and all living things, through action and our inaction. The vision of Just Peace is much more than the restoration of right relationships in community; it also compels human beings to care for the earth as our home. We must trust in God's promise and strive for an equitable and just sharing of the earth's resources.

27 Building cultures of peace. We are committed to building cultures of peace in cooperation with people of other religious traditions, convictions and worldviews. In this commitment we seek to respond to the gospel imperatives of loving our neighbours, rejecting violence and seeking justice for the poor, the disinherited and the oppressed (Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 4:18). The collective effort relies on the gifts of men and women, the young and the old, leaders and workers. We acknowledge and value women's gifts for building peace. We recognize the unique role of religious leaders, their influence in societies and the potentially liberating power of religious wisdom and insight in promoting peace and human dignity. At the same time, we lament the cases where religious leaders have abused their power for selfish ends or where cultural and religious patterns have contributed to violence and oppression. We are especially concerned about aggressive rhetoric and teaching propagated under the guise of religion and amplified by the power of media. While we acknowledge with deep humility Christian complicity—past and present—in the manifestation of prejudice and other attitudes that fuel hate, we commit ourselves to build communities of reconciliation, acceptance and love.

28 **Education for peace.** Education inspired by the vision of peace is more than instruction in the strategies of peace work. It is a profoundly spiritual formation of character that involves family, church, and society. Peace education teaches us to nurture the spirit of peace, instil respect for human rights, and imagine and adopt alternatives to violence. Peace education promotes active nonviolence as an unequalled power for change that is practiced and valued in different traditions and cultures. Education of character and conscience equips people to seek peace and pursue it.

SEEKING AND PURSUING JUST PEACE TOGETHER

29 The Christian pilgrimage toward peace presents many opportunities to build visible and viable communities for peace. A church that prays for peace, serves its community, uses money ethically, cares for the environment and cultivates good relations with others can become an instrument for peace. Furthermore, when churches work in a united way for peace, their witness becomes more credible (John 17:21).

FOR PEACE IN THE COMMUNITY

so that all may live free from fear (Micah 4:4)

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness…?" "Love your neighbor as yourself." "Pray for those who persecute you." (Micah 6:8; Luke 10:27; Matthew 5:44)

30 **Global challenges.** All too many communities are divided by economic class, by race, color and caste, by religion and gender. Homes and schools are plagued by violence and abuse. Women and children are violated physically, psychologically and by cultural practice. Drug and alcohol abuse and suicide are forms of self-destruction on a large scale. Workplaces and houses of worship are scarred by conflicts within the community. Prejudice and racism deny human dignity. Workers are exploited and industries pollute the environment. Health care is inaccessible for many and affordable for only a few. There is a widening gap between the rich and

the poor. Traditions that bind communities together are weakened by commercial influences and imported lifestyles. Media, games and entertainment that promote violence, war and pornography distort community values and invite destructive behaviors. When violence occurs, young males will generally be perpetrators as well as victims and women and children will find themselves at greatest risk.

31 **Main directions.** Churches become builders of a culture of peace as they engage, cooperate and learn from one another. Members, families, parishes and communities will be involved. The tasks include learning to prevent conflicts and transform them; to protect and empower those who are marginalized; to affirm the role of women in resolving conflict and building peace and include them in all such initiatives; to support and participate in nonviolent movements for justice and human rights; and to give peace education its rightful place in churches and schools. A culture of peace requires churches and other faith and community groups to challenge violence wherever it happens: this concerns structural and habitual violence as well as the violence that pervades media entertainment, games and music. Cultures of peace are realized when all, especially women and children, are safe from sexual violence and protected from armed conflict, when deadly weapons are banned and removed from communities, and domestic violence is addressed and stopped.

32 If churches are to be peacemakers, Christians must first strive for unity in action for peace. Congregations must unite to break the culture of silence about the violence within church life and unite to overcome habitual disunity in the face of the violence within our communities.

FOR PEACE WITH THE EARTH

so that life is sustained

God created the world and made it whole, offering humanity life in all its fullness. Yet sin breaks relationships between people and with the created order. Creation longs for the children of God to be stewards of life, of justice and of love. (Gen. 2:1-3; John 10:10; Romans 8:20-22)

33 **Global challenges.** Human beings are to respect and protect creation. But greed at many levels, self-centeredness and a belief in unlimited growth have brought exploitation and destruction on the earth and its creatures. The cries of the poor and vulnerable echo in the groans of the earth. Excessive consumption of fossil fuels and other limited resources is doing violence to people and the planet. Climate change as a consequence of human lifestyles poses a global threat to just peace. Global warming, the rise of sea levels and the increasing frequency and intensity of droughts and floods affect especially the most vulnerable populations in the world. Indigenous people are exemplary in sustainable living and, along with inhabitants of coral atolls and impoverished coastal communities, they are among those who contribute the least to global warming. Yet they are the ones who will suffer the most.

34 **Main directions.** To care for God's precious gift of creation and to strive for ecological justice are key principles of just peace. For Christians they are also an expression of the gospel's call to repent from wasteful use of natural resources and be converted daily. Churches and their members must be cautious with earth's resources, especially with water. We must protect the populations most vulnerable to climate change and help to secure their rights.

35 Church members and parishes around the world must self-critically assess their environmental impact. Individually and in communities, Christians need to learn to live in ways that allow the entire earth to thrive. Many more "eco-congregations" and "green" churches are needed locally. Much ecumenical advocacy is needed globally for the implementation of international agreements and protocols among governments and businesses in order to ensure a more inhabitable earth not only for us but also for all creatures and for future generations.

FOR PEACE IN THE MARKETPLACE

so that all may live with dignity

In wondrously creating a world with more than enough natural riches to support countless generations of human beings and other living

things, God makes manifest a vision for all people to live in fullness of life and with dignity, regardless of class, gender, religion, race or ethnicity. (Ps. 24:1; Ps. 145:15; Isaiah 65:17-23)

36 **Global challenges.** Even as tiny global elites accumulate unimaginable wealth, more than 1.4 billion humans subsist in extreme poverty. There is something profoundly wrong when the wealth of the world's three richest individuals is greater than the gross domestic product of the world's 48 poorest countries. Ineffective regulation, innovative but immoral financial instruments, distorted reward structures and other systemic factors exacerbated by greed trigger global financial crises that wipe out millions of jobs and impoverish tens of millions of people. The widening socio-economic chasms within and between nations raise serious questions about the effectiveness of market-oriented economic liberalization policies in eradicating poverty and challenge the pursuit of growth as an overriding objective for any society. Over-consumption and deprivation are forms of violence. Global military expenditures—now higher than during the Cold War—do little to enhance international peace and security and much to endanger it; weapons do not address the main threats to humanity but use vast resources that could be rededicated to that end. Such disparities pose fundamental challenges to justice, social cohesion and the public good within what has become a global human community.

37 **Main directions.** Peace in the marketplace is nurtured by creating "economies of life". Their essential foundations are equitable socio-economic relationships, respect for workers rights, the just sharing and sustainable use of resources, healthy and affordable food for all, and broad participation in economic decision-making.

38 Churches and their partners in society must advocate for the full implementation of economic, social and cultural rights. Churches must promote alternative economic policies for sustainable production and consumption, redistributive growth, fair taxes, fair trade, and the universal provisioning of clean water, clean air and other common goods. Regulatory structures and policies must reconnect finance not only to economic production but also to hu-

man need and ecological sustainability. Deep cuts in military spending should be made in order to fund programs that advance the goals of sufficient food, shelter, education and health for all people and that provide remedies for climate change. Human and ecological security must become a greater economic priority than national security.

FOR PEACE AMONG THE PEOPLES

so that human lives are protected

We are made in the image of the Giver of Life, forbidden to take life, and charged to love even enemies. Judged with equity by a righteous God, nations are called to embrace truth in the public square, turn weapons into farm implements, and not learn war any more. (Exodus 20:17; Isaiah 2:1-4; Matthew 5:44)

39 **Global challenges.** Human history is illuminated by courageous pursuits of peace and the transformation of conflict, advances in the rule of law, new norms and treaties that govern the use of force, and now judicial recourse against abuses of power that involve even heads of state. History is stained, however, by the moral and political opposites of these—including xenophobia, intercommunal violence, hate crimes, war crimes, slavery, genocide and more. Although the spirit and logic of violence is deeply rooted in human history, the consequences of such sins have increased exponentially in recent times, amplified by violent applications of science, technology and wealth.

40 A new ecumenical agenda for peace today is even more urgent because of the nature and the scope of such dangers now. We are witnesses to prodigious increases in the human capacity to destroy life and its foundations. The scale of the threat, the collective human responsibility behind it, and the need for a concerted global response are without precedent. Two threats of this magnitude—nuclear holocaust and climate change—could destroy much life and all prospects for Just Peace. Both are violent misuses of the energy inherent in Creation. One catastrophe stems from the

proliferation of weapons, especially *weapons of mass destruction*; the other threat may be understood as the proliferation of *lifestyles of mass extinction*. The international community struggles to gain control of both threats with little success.

41 **Main directions.** To respect the sanctity of life and build peace among peoples, churches must work to strengthen international human rights law as well as treaties and instruments of mutual accountability and conflict resolution. To prevent deadly conflicts and mass killings, the proliferation of small arms and weapons of war must be stopped and reversed. Churches must build trust and collaborate with other communities of faith and people of different worldviews to reduce national capacities for waging war, eliminate weapons that put humanity and the planet at unprecedented risk, and generally delegitimize the institution of war.

* * *

42 **A people born to longing.** Our home is not what it might and will be. While life in God's hands is irrepressible, peace does not yet reign. The principalities and powers, though not sovereign, still enjoy their victories, and we will be restless and broken until peace prevails. Thus our peace building will of necessity criticize, denounce, advocate, and resist as well as proclaim, empower, console, reconcile, and heal. Peacemakers will speak against and speak for, tear down and build up, lament and celebrate, grieve and rejoice. Until our longing joins our belonging in the consummation of all things in God, the work of peace will continue as the flickering of sure grace.

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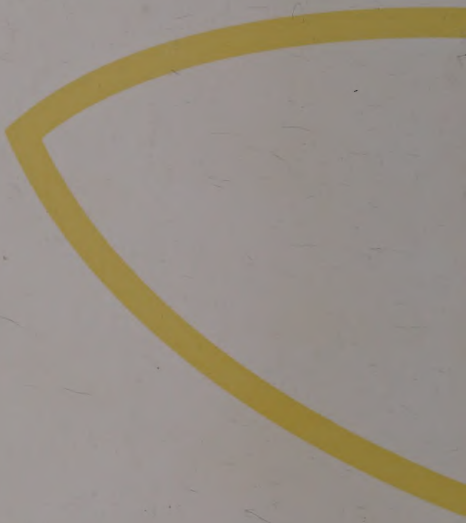

WCC GENEVA
1071791902

World Council of Churches

150 Route de Ferney, PO Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2 Switzerland
Tel: (+41 22) 791 6111 Fax: (+41 22) 791 0361
www.oikoumene.org